



Audi A2



LIKE IT OR NOT, WE'LL ALL HAVE to get used to driving smaller, less polluting cars in future. But as Mercedes has shown with its novelly packaged, tiny-but-tall A-Class, small doesn't have to mean cramped, low-rent city cars. Far from it.

Given the success of the baby Merc, and Audi's *Vorsprung durch Technik* approach, unsurprisingly, the new 'baby Audi' totes more than a few technical tricks up its sleeve.

For starters, it's the first all-aluminium, space frame-built small car to enter volume production. With the space frame itself weighing a mere 75kg, Audi claims the A2's body is some 40 per cent lighter than if made from steel – making it about 150kg lighter than most cars of this size.

Low weight, combined with a rounded, wind-cleaving shape, not only fosters good performance, it also provides the double whammy of lower fuel consumption and reduced emissions. And that's only for the 60mpg 75bhp 1.4 petrol version; the A2's super-efficient three-cylinder diesel offers up to 80mpg on the official 'combined' cycle.

But you won't be seeing much of the A2's power units. The dipstick and fluid reservoirs live tucked away behind a dummy grille 'service flap', so the lightweight, lift-off bonnet could effectively be sealed between the two-year service intervals.

No longer than a Fiesta, the A2 features Audi's Space Floor Concept that maximises back seat legroom and headroom, using extra-deep footwells to permit more upright seating.

The resulting airy, spacious feel to the cabin is partly due to the standard car's four-seat layout. The dual back seats fold singly or together, or can be taken out entirely, if needed. But a three-belt bench back seat is on the cards (if only as an option) for when the A2 goes on sale here in September.

Slip aboard the A2 (rather than stepping up or down into it) and its quality fit and feel are immediately apparent, along with a lofty driving position and taut controls. The diesel feels the more eager (and endearing) of the two engines, but neither is notably strong in terms of refinement.

Similarly, the firm, sporty ride and agile handling provide plenty of fun at the wheel, yet a touch more fine-tuning would make the A2 better still.



VERDICT

Limited volume will restrict the number of A2s; they won't be cheap, either. But Audi's new baby lights the way for a new breed of small, yet premium quality, car that's not only satisfying to drive, but ecologically sound, too. It's a technical tour de force that's more satisfying than the small Merc, both to drive or be driven in.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★○○
Comfort	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○

THE A2 RANGE

body high-roof supermini, 5 door
trim levels single only
engines petrol: 1.4 4-cyl/75bhp, diesel: 1.4 3-cyl TDI/75bhp
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (no automatic option)
notable features high-tech all-aluminium build; low drag/weight aid excellent fuel economy; 'Space Floor Concept' optimises cabin space; 'sealed bonnet' with service flap; 2-year service intervals; alloy wheels, ABS and ESP standard

LIKES AND GRIPES

deep tailgate opening eases loading
 single pantograph-arm front wiper
 'quart-into-a-pint-pot' packaging
 80mpg potential (diesel)

four-seat only layout (on launch cars)
 intrusive curved screen pillars
 space-saver/cover limit load height
 big(ish) price for a little car

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (exc mirrors)	383 x 167
front- legroom	87-112
- headroom (<i>no sunroof</i>)	95-100
rear- typical legroom	101
- typical kneeroom	72
- headroom	93
- hiproom	124
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	216/7.6
load length (seats up/folded)	50/135
load width	96
load sill (inside/outside)	6/74
boot/load aperture height	45/74

ALTERNATIVES

Mercedes A-Class micro Merc's three-pointed star status and novel layout offer space for 4/5 adults - *just!*
VW Golf classy well-built hatch offers more space and pace at similar cost, but lacks the A2's novel, stylish make-up
Renault Scenic trendsetting mid-sized MPV misses deep-rooted build quality, yet oozes spacious fun and versatility